**U.S. Legislators, AIPAC Push anti-BDS Bill After UN Letter Warns Companies Against Operating in Settlements**

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Legislators in the U.S. Congress and pro-Israeli organizations said on Thursday that the letter sent by the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights to companies doing business in Israeli settlements in the West Bank, underscores the importance of passing the "Israel Anti-Boycott Act," a proposed piece of legislation that would make it illegal for U.S. Companies to participate in boycotts against Israel organized by international bodies, such as the United Nations.

The letter, first reported by Haaretz on Wednesday, was sent by the UN's Human Rights Commissioner two weeks ago to 150 companies in Israel and around the world, warning them that they are about to be added to a database of companies doing business in Israeli settlements in the West Bank and in East Jerusalem, senior Israeli officials and Western diplomats involved in the matter said.

The letters, copies of which also reached the Israeli government, request that these firms send the commission clarifications about their business activities in settlements. A Western diplomat, who also requested to remain anonymous, noted that of the 150 companies, some 30 were American, and a number are from countries including Germany, South Korea and Norway. The remaining half are Israeli companies.

Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, a Democrat from New York, told Haaretz that "the UN has an appalling track record of not treating Israel in a fair way, and this is another sad example. I am strongly opposed to the BDS movement and I support the 'Israel Anti-Boycott Act' because foreign entities and international organizations, like the UN, should not be able to coerce or bully American companies into boycotting Israel, an American ally."

Rep. Ted Deutch, a Democrat from Florida and a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, told Haaretz that he is "outraged and appalled by this blatantly biased action by the United Nations Human Rights Commissioner." He added that “The Israel Anti-Boycott Act, which I have proudly cosponsored, would make it a policy of the U.S. to oppose the Human Rights Council resolution that led to the creation of this ‘blacklist.’ It would also block American companies from participating in an Israeli boycott by the UN or other international governmental organization."

According to Rep. Deutch, “this news out of Geneva is a powerful reminder of why Congress should move forward with our legislation that stands firmly against BDS and with our ally Israel.”

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC), the most prominent pro-Israel organization in the United States, also highlighted the "Anti-Boycott Act" in its reaction to the UN letter, stating that the legislation "would protect American companies from exactly this type of threat."

AIPAC added that "threats by the United Nations or any other international governmental organization against American companies are unacceptable. Congress has always defended American companies against such blackmail, and has firmly rejected any effort to boycott Israel. Congress should pass the Israel Anti-Boycott Act at the earliest possible date, and work with the administration to protect American companies and our allies."

The anti-boycott legislation was first proposed in March of this year, and it enjoys strong bi-partisan support in both houses of Congress. Over the summer, however, it came under sharp criticism from civil rights organizations, who warned that the legislation was written in a way that implies US citizens could face jail time and fines of up to half a million dollars, if they express support for boycotting Israeli settlements in the West Bank. The American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) asked lawmakers to oppose the legislation.

A number of democrats who originally supported the legislation, announced that they would review and reconsider it in light of the ACLU's position. Two lawmakers - Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (a Democrat from New York) and Rep. Adam Smith (a Democrat from Washington) - later announced that despite their strong opposition to boycotts of Israel, they will not support the legislation unless its' language is clarified. They urged the original co-sponsors of the bill, Senators Ben Cardin (a Democrat from Maryland) and Rob Portman (a Republican from Ohio) to change the bill's wording in order to avoid legal ambiguity.

On Wednesday, Senator Cardin told reporters in Washington that the legislation will indeed be "clarified" in order to make it easier for additional Democratic lawmakers to support it. Cardin said that the bill's critics are wrong, but that he wants to give fellow Senators "more comfort" to support his legislation.

The UN letter was also attacked by the Republican Jewish Coalition, which stated that "If only the UN could find time to get serious about Syria, Iran, North Korea and any other number of serious problems facing the world. Instead, they waste time and resources on attacking the one democracy in the Middle East, Israel."